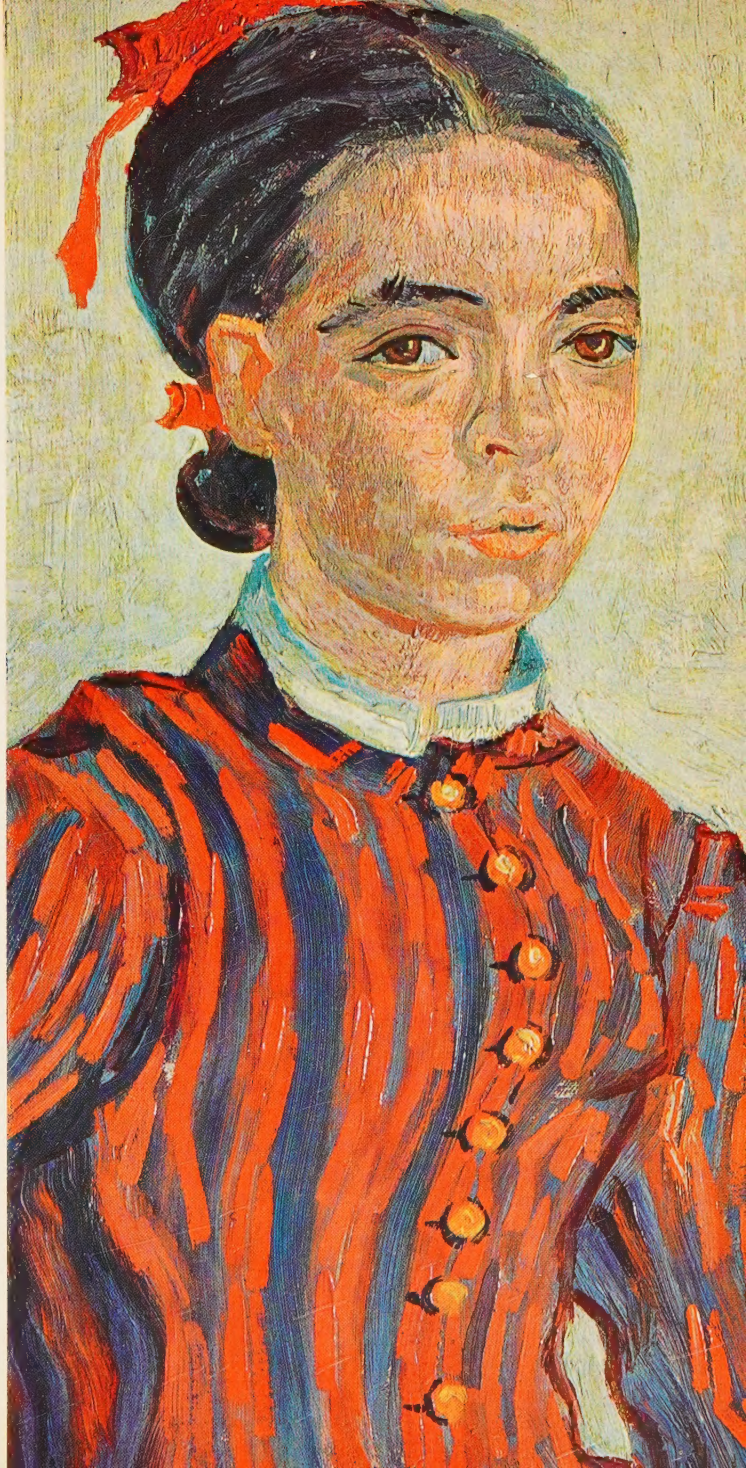
VAN GOGH



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THE PORTRAITS OF VAN GOGH

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VAN GOGH

PORTRAITS

BY

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TRANSLATED BY DIANA IMBER

THE CAPTIONS TO THE ILLUSTRATIONS ARE TAKEN
FROM VAN GOGH'S LETTERS

Plate on the Title page:

LE NEVEU RAVOUX A TROIS ANS (1890)
Jäggli-Hahnloser, Winterthur

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Van Gogh's portraits are a record of friendship. A portrait painter is commissioned, and delineates the features of men and women unknown to him and whose faces he has not chosen to paint. But Vincent Van Gogh never received a single commission in his life. He never even had enough money to pay for models, and was thus involuntarily forced into the rare and privileged position of not having to paint faces which did not interest him. Only those who liked him were willing to pose, and he painted the friends who were loyal to him in his short and dramatic struggle to bring his art to perfection.

Vincent Van Gogh was born on the 30th March, 1853, in a small Dutch village near the Belgian border. He was—or imagined himself to be—unloved. Exactly a year before his birth, his parents had had the misfortune to lose their only child, who was also called Vincent. The tomb of the first Vincent is only a few yards from the house in which he was born, near the entrance of the church where his father was pastor. Vincent's parents were sensitive, cultured people, of merchant, artistic, and artisan stock. At home he never found the peace of mind he longed for, although, as a child, he did not lack companions. But he was lonely, and his earliest companions were the trees and flowers of the Belgian

Plain, where he loved to roam for hours at a time, or the books which he read avidly while still very young. It was only later that Vincent found in his brothers and sisters the love he craved, and this above all in Théo, who was three years younger and destined to be his life-long friend.

None of the Van Gogh children continued their studies for long. Vincent's work did not interest him very much, either at the village school (where his companions were mostly Catholic and may have bullied him), or in the town where he spent three years at a boarding-school. At sixteen he had a vast but ill-assorted store of knowledge. Due to the influence of an uncle, a rich picture-dealer, he found employment at the Goupil Gallery in The Hague. This was an enviable job. Here Vincent discovered and was inspired by painting, and for four years proved himself to be gifted, keen, and punctual. As a sign of recognition he was sent, at twenty years of age, to the Goupil Gallery in London to finish his education. A fine career lay before him. Why, then, was this young man—chaste, retiring, and adolescent—destined to fall passionately in love with the daughter of his landlady, a French girl named Ursula? He felt himself clumsily unable to declare his love, and when he finally forced himself to make a crude, unpolished approach, it was too late and he was rejected. He had devoted himself so completely to this secret love that he felt shattered. It was not merely failure in his eyes; his whole future crumbled before him. After a short period in Paris, he suddenly resigned from the Gallery. He wanted to return to England, where his hopes still lay, and to try to find an outlet for his seemingly aimless energy, so he became a language teacher in a convent school. A short experiment—another failure. He was sent to London to collect money owed by pupils, usually from poor districts. This was his first contact with the slums, and he was shocked by the idea of taking money from the poor.

He felt that the right course could only be a purely religious mission. In England, aged twenty-three, he chose the ministry as his vocation,

1. DRIECK DEKKERS, LE TISSERAND (1884)
Hahnloser Collection, Berne

"How is it that I am so little an artist that I always regret the inanimity of a statue or a table?"

and began to preach. So that he could the better fulfil his duties as a minister he decided to resume his studies which had been interrupted seven years before. He again took up Latin and Greek, but unhappily it was too late for him to submit once more to the rigorous disciplines of academic work. After a year of effort Vincent gave up, and chose a working-class ministry in the flat, gloomy mining district of Borinage, in Belgium. The years 1878 and 1879 were a period of frightful hardship for Van Gogh. The miners had no protection against the frequent accidents, epidemics, unemployment, or the often catastrophic reductions in wages. Appointed pastor in the heart of this Black Country, Vincent felt that he had a duty to give material aid to the poverty-stricken miners. A fire-damp accident, a strike, or an epidemic, enormously increased his burden, and he had no help from the hierarchy of Protestant Ministers. Nevertheless, he stayed among his friends, and, in trying to help them, gave everything he had. Worn out by months of hardship and illness, and in despair because his help was not sufficiently effective, he decided that he had neither the self-possession nor the stability necessary for the ministry. He accepted an invitation to stay with his parents at Etten, in Holland, to try to recover his broken health.

It was during these dreary months that Van Gogh rediscovered art, one of his earliest passions. At Borinage, where he had no access to books and was far from the museums, he started to draw. From then onwards he turned to drawing for solace, and later to painting. A fresh hope, soon to be frustrated, increased this tendency to use art as a refuge. His cousin, Key, whose husband had died a few months before, was staying at Etten. Van Gogh loved Key, and she did not reject him. But her unswerving fidelity to the memory of her dead husband dashed all his hopes of marriage. With this dream of his own home, his own fireside, he drifted a few months later into the creation of a substitute. While living at The Hague, learning to paint, he met a woman of the streets who was ill and pregnant. She was called Sien, and he lived with

2. PAYSANNE (1885)
Bührle Collection, Zurich

"One must not be deceived by the times ; one must feel the corrupt and fetid airs that precede the storm, saying my heart is heavy, but our children will breathe more freely."

her and her children for several months, maintaining them with the help of financial assistance from Théo. From preference or greed, and in spite of his love and care, Sien turned once more to prostitution, and Vincent left her sorrowfully. In future he placed all his hope in painting, but he was already thirty-one, and had only six years to live.

He spent the years 1885 and 1886 at Nuenen, where his father had been sent as a minister. He painted a great deal, and found his first models—peasants, workmen, companions, and friends. Led on by his taste for study, he left for Antwerp shortly after his father's death. He followed the courses at the Academy for four months, but Paris was the artist's Mecca, and there Théo lived. Vincent arrived in the capital in 1886.

Théo was the director of a picture-gallery, and it was through him that this strange and ardent Dutchman was welcomed into the circle of cosmopolitan and completely unprejudiced art-students. Degas, Manet and Renoir were already established and Vincent scarcely ever saw them; but Toulouse-Lautrec, Gauguin, Pissarro, Guillaumin, Seurat, Signac, Emile Bernard, and many others became his friends. To enjoy stimulating friendship was a new experience for Van Gogh. He was encouraged in his work; his technique was transformed and his choice of subjects grew wider. He began to paint portraits.

After living in Paris for twenty months he yearned for warmth, beauty, and above all for calm. On the advice of Toulouse-Lautrec he set out for the Midi and stopped at Arles. Vincent was immediately enraptured by Provence. The light, the colour, the countryside, the hospitality and gaiety of the Arlesians, excited and captivated him. His spirit unfolded. At Arles he painted almost as many portraits as landscapes. His friends were the real heroes of his works, for they helped him towards realization and mastery of his style.

The happiness of Arles however, with its harvest of joyful and serene canvases, was interrupted by Vincent's first nervous attack which happened on the evening of December 23rd, 1888. Gauguin had come to

3. LA MÈRE TANGUY (1887)
Bâle Museum, Staechelin Foundation

"Xantippe, Mère Tanguy, and other women, by some strange quirk of nature, have heads of stone. Such women are much more dangerous than the mad dogs of the Institut Pasteur. Père Tanguy would be justified in killing his wife... but he would not do it any more than did Socrates..."

stay again two months earlier, to paint with him in the Midi. They worked incessantly, and often quarrelled. Sleeping and eating little, they smoked and drank too much. Nobody knows what happened that night. On the morning of the 24th December a Police Superintendant was called and found Vincent lying in a pool of blood. He was taken to hospital, where it was found that he had cut off the lobe of his ear.

From December 1888 to July 1890 Vincent experienced the frightening depressions which follow prolonged nervous attacks. He lay unconscious, sometimes for hours on end, or was pursued by fearful nightmares and hallucinations which would continue for several days. During the months of respite and hope he painted with indomitable courage. More than ever now he painted the people who helped him, for, indeed, he had nothing else he could give them—the doctor at Arles hospital on December 24th, 1888, the warden of the Saint-Rémy asylum where he was a patient for a year, and the doctor who looked after him at Auvers, fifteen miles from Paris, during the last two months of his life. On the 27th June 1890 Vincent shot himself in the chest with a pistol. Perhaps he feared the onset of another attack, but more than anything it seems he was afraid lest he be a burden to his brother and his wife at a time when Théo was thinking of giving up his job. He lay dying for two days, fully conscious, then he died, apparently peacefully, in Théo's arms, without uttering a word of revolt. Tanguy, Gachet, and Ravoux, all friends whose portraits he had painted, followed his coffin to the cemetery at Auvers-sur-Oise.

There is a close connection between Van Gogh's life and his work. Too close a study of the more dramatic episodes of his now almost legendary career is inadvisable, but a knowledge of the man helps to cultivate a taste for his paintings. Every day he wrote straightforward, moving, and touching letters to his brother, Théo, and to his friends. They are a key to his life, and to his struggle, though in no sense do they comprise a theory of art.

4. JULIEN TANGUY (1887)

Colour and picture-dealer in the rue Clauzel. Niarchos Collection, Paris.

"We went along to Tanguy's as though his shop were a museum... members of the Institute, influential critics and reformers, all went to his humble shop which, unknown to him, had become a legend in Paris and the talk of the studios. Nothing else was as strange as these prints... young men saw genius in them, old men incredible contradictions, and jealousy raved" (Émile Bernard.)

Today, when so many painters are as famous as great military leaders once were, when art is an instrument for resounding material success, and when pictures are not only mysterious but incomprehensible to the general public, it needs an effort of the imagination to understand the state of Van Gogh's mind. For him, painting was never a career—never, even, his ultimate objective. Perhaps greater artists, such as Monet or Cézanne, have found the purpose of their lives in art, and have sacrified everything, even their own families, to it, but for Van Gogh it was a method of living—a means of contact with humanity. It is true that he was passionately interested in painting; he continually tried new techniques and sought to bring his craft to perfection. But Vincent never shut himself up like an alchemist to discover the secrets of his art; his ideal lay elsewhere.

"You must not think," he wrote to Théo, "that I am renouncing anything. I am faithful in my infidelity, but I am tormented by the problem of how I can be of some use to the world..."

His apparently unco-ordinated experiments were connected by a single passion, a single vocation, which found its final expression in art—to be of service to others. Vincent tried desperately to create a home, a middle- or working-class family, and to find a place for himself in society as a father, a teacher, a pastor, and finally as a painter. He was lonely, even when still very young, and he struggled all his life to escape this feeling of isolation. His behaviour, which had been strange since childhood, and later his illness, tended to set him apart, and to increase his eagerness and hope. The indifference of the public towards his pictures during his lifetime, compared with the extraordinary enthusiasm today, was not just a trick of fate. There was just as much contrast between what he felt and what he hoped for. His painting is an appeal. His vivid colours are the cries of an abandoned child. The seeming division between the sombre palette of his Dutch period and the flamboyant paintings of the later years is entirely superficial; they represent the same cry for help,

5. LE PÈRE TANGUY (1887)
Musée Rodin, Paris

"I am much more interested in the portrait than in any other aspect of art—that is to say, the modern portrait. I am experimenting with colour: I want to do portraits which will seem like apparitions, like ghosts from the past to future generations."

dramatic and low-pitched in the early years, growing piercingly sad towards the end. Others believed themselves capable of taking art a step forward. Van Gogh tried to stir the emotions of his equals, to give help to the onlookers in art, in the same way as he had wanted to support those who had listened to his sermons, or to maintain Ursula, Key, Sien, and his unborn children.

To appreciate Van Gogh we have to forget the epoch in which he lived. The young advocates of "contemporary baroque", summed up in the formula, "Art for Art's sake", were strangers to him, The great works of the Renaissance were altar-pieces, whose beauty purified their utilitarian function of representing God to the faithful. Fra Angelico prayed and painted in turn as an expression of one and the same faith. Van Gogh's ideal was equally simple, equally practical. His brave confidence in the beauty and nobility of the human struggle, the adventure of the universe, and the goodness of men, led him to denounce social injustice. He did not paint with the intention of creating decoration, but to communicate his faith and hope to men, to help them rediscover their peace of mind. He painted in the same way as a man loves.

"I always have the melancholy feeling of finding no place in real life. I mean that it is better to create in the flesh than in colour and pigment, to create children rather than pictures."

It is difficult to classify Van Gogh's pictures in the normal way. He was not a professional portraitist, but in every canvas he proclaims himself a painter of human beings. "I prefer painting the eyes of a human being to an imposing cathedral; the spirit of man, even in the eyes of a poor beggar or a street girl, interests me far more."

Everything in his work—sky, trees, and flowers—takes on human form, in contrast to the work of his friends and contemporaries, the Impressionists. For them—painters of landscapes, flowers, and figures—man was merely a *motif*, an object in a scene. The unfeminine forms of Cézanne's bathers, the graceful arabesques of the dancers of Degas,

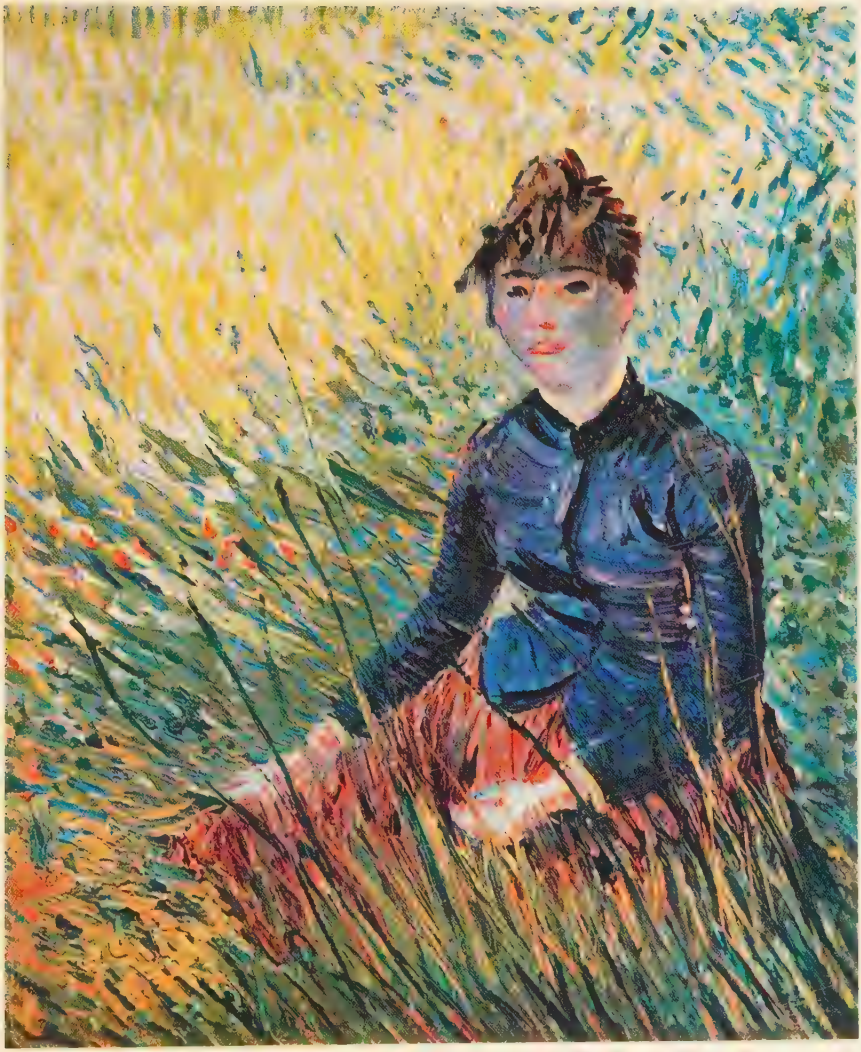
6. AGOSTINA SEGATORI (1887)

Producer of the cabaret called "Le Tambourin". Van Gogh Collection, Laren

"I have come more and more to believe that one must not judge the Lord by events in this world, because we are too humble and ignorant to do so. Let great men fall into this trap. Our consolation lies in the hope of a merciful reward in heaven..."

Renoir's seductive odalisques with their luminous skins, are no more than bodies. The *Moulin de la Galette* and the *Déjeuner des Canotiers* are happy scenes where people are scarcely even individuals. Van Gogh's tendencies lay in exactly the opposite direction. Whereas a woman seated in a field painted by Renoir is one more flower, a simple addition to the landscape, Van Gogh's flowers become symbolic of the human form. Even in shape they sometimes seem human, which was probably an unintentional effect. Vincent instinctively discovered simple allegories in nature. The famous *Plaine aux Corbeaux sous un Ciel d'Orage*, painted during the last weeks at Auvers, is a poignant reminder of his suicide, but the faded suns, painted at Arles as early as 1888, cast also the long shadows of death, more restrained but none the less striking. In Van Gogh's work trees, plants, clouds, and objects of all kinds, as well as day and night, have a language of their own, as though nothing could escape the reflection of human joys and fears. At the time when he was painting and repainting the famous *Moisson jaune*—a peasant at work under the hot Provençal sun—he wrote to his brother: "I saw in this man harvesting a hazy figure desperately struggling to finish his task in the burning heat. And I saw him as the image of death reaping the human corn. But there is nothing sad in that kind of death; it happens in the bright light, under a sun which floods everything with pure gold light."

The *Vieux Saules*, willows stripped bare like wretched old men and women, evokes the melancholy of life; his cypresses have an austere and rigid human pride. Sometimes he did this quite intentionally, as in the two curious "portraits of objects," *Le Fauteuil de Gauguin* and *La Chaise de Vincent*, painted at Arles during the tumultuous Autumn of 1888. The armchair (relatively comfortable), the candle (symbol of the light of the prophet), the green tones, the books, all go to make a realistic, humorous, and entirely unmalicious evocation of the proud theoretician, the cold, egotistical leader of the Pont-Aven school. On Vincent's chair there is only a pipe and a tobacco-pouch.



7. FEMME DANS UN PRÉ (1887)
Private Collection, New York

"If one studies Japanese painting one sees a wise old man quietly passing his time—is he studying the distance between earth and the moon? By no means. The politics and strategy of Bismarck? Not at all. He observes and learns from a blade of grass. This blade of grass then leads him on to draw all the plants, then the seasons, afterwards animals, and finally man."

Van Gogh began his career as a draughtsman and painter at Borinage, and when he returned to Holland his mind was full of the preoccupations which had been his concern in the Black Country. His first portraits, or rather his first figure-drawings, are a social protest. For several years he did not paint, he only drew. His earliest large composition shows a horrifying panorama of women miners, their lamps beside them, bowed down under heavy loads of coal. Vincent—the Vincent of the Dutch period—is revealed in a figure-drawing entitled *Sorrow*, which is one of his masterpieces. This tragic, even cruel work shows the prostitute, Sien, with whom he spent two years of imperfect happiness at The Hague. Sien is nude, seated on a rock, her head bowed on her knees and hidden in her folded arms. In the background there is a desolate landscape; on the left, a leafless tree. Hope is represented at the foot of the composition by blades of lily of the valley growing up through the weeds. Underneath the drawing Vincent had copied these words from Michelet: "How can there be even a single lonely and desolate woman on this earth?" Is this the drawing of an artist, or is it political propaganda? "I would give ten *Mona Lisa's* for the happiness of one suffering human being," Vincent declared. His drawing of *Sorrow* proclaims the same spirit. He makes no concessions to beauty, because here even the gaze—refuge of the spirit in the wreck of a human body—is absent. Despite its obvious realism it is certainly less a portrait than a protest. It is not Sien's image, but the image of suffering. He seems to have set himself the task of painting a portrait of suffering during these five years in Holland. "In the old masters," he wrote, "people do not work. It is essentially a modern trend to show the peasant at work, and he is at the heart of modern art. . . . We are in the last quarter of a century which will end in a mighty revolution. I feel that art will find a place in the heart of the people, and that I must lose myself among the humblest."

If it is dangerous to seek an illustration of Van Gogh's political leanings in the work of his Dutch period, it is no less dangerous to claim

8. AUTOPORTRAIT DE VAN GOGH AU CHAPEAU MOU (1887)
Van Gogh Collection, Laren

"To achieve anything in the world you must completely forget yourself. People who preach a religious belief live that belief only. Man is not here just to be happy, or even simply to be honest, he is here to do great things for the society in which he lives." (Renan quoted by Van Gogh.)

to admire his canvases and yet to ignore his obvious intentions. At this point Vincent was still pursuing his social mission without yet having learned to withdraw far enough to give it artistic expression. Everything which was individual to him seemed frivolous, and this attitude turned his attention away from the true portrait. To be sure, he painted figures more often than he painted still-life or landscape, but the beauty of the human face, and above all of the eyes which mirror the spirit, interested him little. Besides, most of the men and women whom he painted are shown with their attributes—the peasant's spade, the spinning-wheel, and so forth. At Nuenen he made friends with the villagers, visited several homes, and often worked at Drieck Drekkers', the weaver (Plate 1). Despite his extensive circle of friends, he did not feel any need to paint real portraits. Indeed, in many of the early portraits the weaver's head is hidden by parts of the loom.

During the Spring of 1885 he worked at the house of the farmer, de Groot, on an important composition which occupied him for several months. He took longer now on the sketches and the preparation for a work. His models at this early period were few. He chose one or two men and women from the one family who seemed to understand him, but it is easy to see where his efforts were leading. He wanted to evoke the atmosphere of resignation and sadness at a peasant's table by paying great attention to careful composition, and by emphasizing details typical of the scene. He has not shown the personal worth of any of these beings, nor their individual qualities. The woman has her back turned. Men and women look alike—the same heavy features, the same thick nose and mouth (Plate 2). In *Les Mangeurs de Pommes de Terre* Vincent had still not discovered the individual face.

Van Gogh's first portrait was of himself. He painted it at Antwerp in 1886. It was a period of great change. *Les Mangeurs de Pommes de Terre* had needed a prolonged effort. The day after his father's death, which had been a great shock to him, he broke away from the dark tones

9. UNE ARLÉSIENNE DE DOUZE ANS EN MOUSMÉ (July 1888)
National Gallery of Art, Washington (Chester Dale Collection)

"Now if you know what a mousmé *is, I have just painted one. (You will know in any case when you have read Mme. Chrysanthème by Loti.) The picture took me a whole week, and I had to gather all my strength to do it. A* mousmé *is a young Japanese girl of about twelve or fourteen, and a provincial, too, in this case."*

and preoccupations which had been too patently political. Vincent decided to learn his craft afresh, and was admitted to the Antwerp Academy where he discovered Rubens and became interested in Japanese prints. The change in his approach was profound, though his already broad, free, and sensitive drawing, and his vigorous brush-strokes, scarcely altered. Suddenly, he abandoned the theme of labourers so dear to Millet, and painted every subject which came to his notice in increasingly bright colours. Thus his own face captured his attention, as did the simplest objects around him.

Painting in his room at Antwerp this first self-portrait with the pipe, there began an extraordinary experience for Van Gogh—a protracted dialogue with himself. In four years Vincent painted at least forty self-portraits. Confronted with this impressive series we cannot help thinking of Rembrandt, but it is hardly possible to draw a parallel. Rembrandt kept a diary of his life and character, from the ingenuous pride of youth to the serenity of his lonely old age, and he discovered all the mysteries of fate and the world in his own changing face. Vincent was not so much a philosopher. Why, then, did he paint himself? As is often the case with generous people, he felt an aversion from his own physical appearance. He tended to blame his face for his failures. "A person like me," he wrote, "has a great fire burning within, but no one comes to warm his hands. The passers-by see only a puff of smoke and continue on their way."

Vincent painted several self-portraits in the hope of understanding why this all-consuming fire should be so deeply hidden—why he should be burned away in useless smoke. One by one the portraits show the profound changes in his character. Sometimes he tried to reassure himself, and to present to the onlooker an image at peace with the world. He thought this would be more likely to win their sympathy, and at times like this he showed himself to be calm, simple, middle-class, the great "furnace" subdued, warming, and friendly. At other times, the unrest and disquiet

10. JOSEPH ROULIN, LE POSTIER (August 1888)
Winterthur Museum

"Roulin left yesterday. It was touching to see him saying goodbye to his children. His voice had a strange pure tone, part soothing, part echoing clarion call of the Revolution. But he was not sad. On the contrary: he had a brand new uniform, and everyone fêted him."

are etched on his features. He tried to delineate the mental anguish, which had seized him long before the attacks of 1889, and to decipher in minute detail what it was that made his face so frightening to other men.

Vincent questioned his canvas in the way others question a mirror, but that was not always the reason for self-portraits. He used his own face for his experiments, for was not his own face always at hand, and free? The division of his work into periods shows this clearly. He painted thirty self-portraits in Antwerp and Paris, and only about ten at Arles and Saint-Rémy, several of which were done for his friends. Most were painted in Paris when Vincent was trying to perfect his technique. In painting his face he used the methods in favour with the Paris artists of about 1888—the light tones of the Impressionists, the dots and lines of the *pointillistes*, the colours of Gauguin and Toulouse-Lautrec—but always in an original and personal way. Sometimes he studied a practical, very limited aspect. For example in the two self-portraits, one in the Louvre and the other in the Bâle Museum, he was trying to work out a new technique for painting the pupil of the eye using a simple geometric shape—the circle. The result was indifferent, so he resorted to a more intricate and highly characteristic brush-stroke which, after he had first tried it in self-portraits, he used until the end of this life. Van Gogh seems to have derived his very original method of composition from studying his own face. After the months in Paris Vincent turned instinctively to a form of composition based on the circle, a method often used in the eighteenth century but abandoned in favour of the systematic balance inaugurated by David. He chose almost perfectly square canvases, and tried to incorporate his design—the movement of the background, the face, and the arrangement of the clothes—into a circular composition without detracting from the realism or the spontaneity of the work. The self-portrait with the felt-hat is one of his first attempts in this style. Those self-portraits done in Paris were, like the scales and *arpeggios* of the pianist, primarily exercises.

11. UN ZOUAVE (August 1888)
Van Gogh Collection, Laren

"The half-length that I've done is horribly crude. The man is in a uniform the colour of a blue enamelled pan, with faded orange frogging and two lemon yellow stars on his breast. It is a brutal combination of clashing colours, which were difficult to reconcile."

On his arrival at Arles a change took place in Van Gogh's work. His letters reveal a composed, almost happy man. He was sure now of his painting, and his artistic development proceeded less rapidly. The character of the self-portraits changed, and they became much more careful paintings. The example which he dedicated to Laval is done with extreme simplicity and realism. He tried to paint it objectively with the intention of making a close likeness of himself to give to his friends who were with Gauguin at Pont-Aven. The portrait which he gave to Gauguin is clear in its intention. Everything in the picture combines to give an effect—the pose, the choice of clothes, the close-cut hair, and the deliberately pale colours. The artist told his brother, Théo, exactly what he was trying to do: "I wrote to Gauguin to tell him that I, too, can magnify my personality in a portrait; that... I had conceived this portrait as a priest of Buddha, a simple worshipper. It is ash-grey on a background of Veronese green (no yellow). I am wearing a jacket bordered with blue, but I have exaggerated the brown so that it is purple, and have enlarged the blue borders. The head is modelled with a full brush, light toned against a pale background, almost without shadows. I have slanted the eyes a little, to make them look Japanese."

Several months later he completed one of his most famous canvases —his *Self-portrait with a Pipe* (Plate 18)—painted during the earliest days of the year 1889. Before beginning this small picture Vincent painted a study, reproduced on Plate 17. The whole picture foreshadows the approaching tragedy—the haggard appearance, the anxious look, and, above all, the striking immediacy and the almost slapdash handling of the paint.

In the Leigh Bloch collection there is a deeply touching portrait. Tragedy is evoked by the violent contrasts of colour: green, blue, red, orange and white. The face itself, with the pipe in the corner of the mouth, is almost calm, expressing the hopeful gravity which Vincent so often mentions in his letters. At Saint-Rémy Vincent painted three

12. JEUNE FILLE SUR FOND ROSE (August 1888)
Kröller-Müller, Otterlo

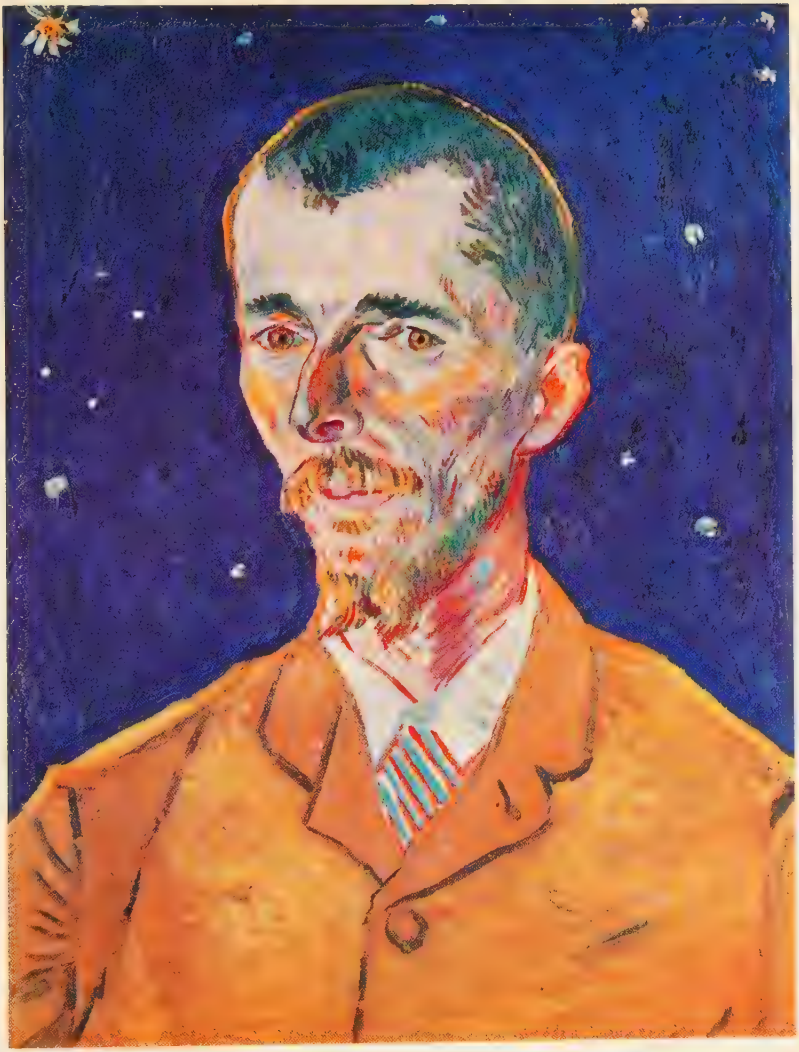
"I have seen a serene and beautiful subject : a girl with a coffee-coloured skin, dark hair and grey eyes, and the pale pink cotton blouse she was wearing revealed her youthful breasts. She was standing against a background of emerald fig trees—a virginal, rustic figure."

self-portraits. The one in the Whitney collection holding his palette, terrifying in its intensity, is shown by his correspondence to be an experiment. But a few weeks later he painted the self-portrait now in the Gachet collection in the Louvre (Plate 22). This is the culmination of the whole series. It is, perhaps, Van Gogh's greatest success, and to some extent also, it is a spiritual testament. He had never before painted so close a likeness, nor such a large self-portrait. He had never succeeded so well in showing both his physical appearance and his character.

As in the case of *L'Homme à l'Oreille coupée* this masterpiece was preceded by a preparatory study—the self-portrait in the Oslo Museum (Plate 21). This clumsily painted but horrifyingly realistic picture occupies a place by itself in Van Gogh's work. It was clearly painted after a nervous attack. It represents a sick and haggard man with bloodshot eyes, and yet a man who has been able to represent himself with striking realism, despite his condition. The portrait of Vincent in the Louvre lacks this fearful look, but its intensity is not reduced. The gentle harmony of greens and blues is scarcely broken by the fair beard and the hair. It is a transfiguration of the recent drama—Vincent, but now a dream. "It is a face of stone," he wrote, "whose spirit has withdrawn towards God in the encircling twilight air." When Vincent brought this picture to Saint-Rémy, at Auvers, to show it to Dr. Gachet he felt that it was his real self, a portrait of his soul.

Van Gogh clung to the hope that his paintings would endure, and that his sacrifice would be worth while. In the last self-portrait—a copy of a *Pietà* of Delacroix done at Auvers—he painted his own suffering features into the face of the dead Christ.

It is a remarkable fact that one of the world's greatest portrait painters began to paint portraits only four years before he died, and produced only a few dozen. Out of the six hundred or so pictures done by Van Gogh in Paris, Arles, Saint-Rémy, and Auvers, only about a hundred are portraits, and if the self-portraits are excluded, only about sixty,



13. LE PEINTRE BELGE EUGÈNE BOCH EN POÈTE (August 1888)
Musée du Louvre, Paris

"It is necessary to paint like this. Otherwise the difference between the modern head—the passion, the tension, the increase in stature—and the smooth calm of classical portraits is not revealed. Gentle, sad, but alert and intelligent, this is the man we should look for in a portrait."

including studies and repetitions. In fact, Van Gogh painted about thirty portraits most of which are known. The reason for this small number was the spreading influence of Impressionism. In 1885 the Paris painters were still following the Impressionists, usually for material reasons, whereas the portrait was the preserve of the academic painter. It is true that portraits were not as despised in 1886 as they were to be in 1960, but the painters in the modern idiom were firmly prejudiced against subjects which might run the risk of comparison with photography. Vincent, though, had quite other reasons. To paint a portrait was not, for him, an impersonal matter. He was trying to explain a character, and, fundamentally, this was the whole aim of his work. For him it was a difficult and dangerous adventure, calling for courage and sympathy with his model. So it is hardly surprising that long periods pass without any portraits. Vincent was quite alone at such times, but when he came back to his friends, happy once more, he would begin afresh on a portrait.

From this point of view the Paris period is barren. He had many acquaintances; none were close friends. The casual *camaraderie* of the painter's studio must have been inimical to his warm and expansive nature. For a few months he found love and affection with a cabaret girl, La Segatori. A friend of Toulouse-Lautrec, she was very interested in painting, and probably became Vincent's mistress for a short time, for his work is kindled by new inspiration. The colour merchant and picture-dealer, Julien Tanguy, who was interested in Cézanne and other unrecognized painters, also helped the Dutch artist from time to time. Vincent painted his portrait, and one of his wife, as well as one of Alexander Reid, who was a painter-dealer and Tanguy's loyal friend.

The finest period of portraiture coincides with the perfection of Vincent's technique—the time spent at Arles. He was then surrounded by friends, simple people with firm and sincere affections. The Ginoux, who kept the station café where he went every day, rented him a house,

14. ARMAND ROULIN A DIX-SEPT ANS (November 1888)
Essen Museum

"How can one express the attraction of opposites, the mysterious vibrations of related tones—how can one reveal a man's thoughts by the movements of light tones on dark, or discover the fire of his being by the light of the setting sun. It must be more than a realistic trompe l'œil, *it is something which really exists."*

and the Roulins furnished it for him. He painted them all with miraculous speed and ardour.

When he was ill and in hospital there were few portraits because he hated the close proximity of the sick, but at Auvers-sur-Oise he was himself once more, painting fifteen fine portraits in two months. He experienced the warmth of human companionship again through the friendship of Dr. Gachet and his family, and Ravoux, the inn-keeper who put him up, and even with the village people. His way of showing love and friendship was to paint.

Not all of Van Gogh's friends appear in the paintings, and although he did portraits of his father and mother, there is not one of Théo. It is a singular gap, but there are many people for whom love is imperfect if they cannot give as well as receive. Probably Gauguin and the other artists were only working friends, with no closer relationship. Characteristic, too, is the small number of unknown portraits which are usually very small in size. Even when he painted the peasants he several times chose the same model. We do not know the name of the girl in *Paysanne au Chapeau* (Plate 26), but it was the same one who posed for the *Jeune Paysanne debout dans les Blés*. Vincent found three-quarters of his models from only five families, a proof of the constancy of his affections.

Van Gogh put so much of himself into his portraits that each one is in some ways like the other. Be it Tanguy or Gachet, heavy Dutch peasants or fresh young girls from Arles, Vincent discovers unconsciously the same human qualities, the same kind of beauty, serious and unsmiling, while their looks and their mouths express a strikingly grave note. They are faces haunted by a dream, reflecting a deep spiritual life, and, in this, Van Gogh's paintings resemble some done in the Middle Ages. Whereas Daumier, Goya, La Tour, and Hals tried to delineate the thoughts and characters of their models, Van Gogh's subjects reveal nothing. They are like saints and worshippers in the Primitives—their looks are full of kindness, their passive calm resigned and meditative.

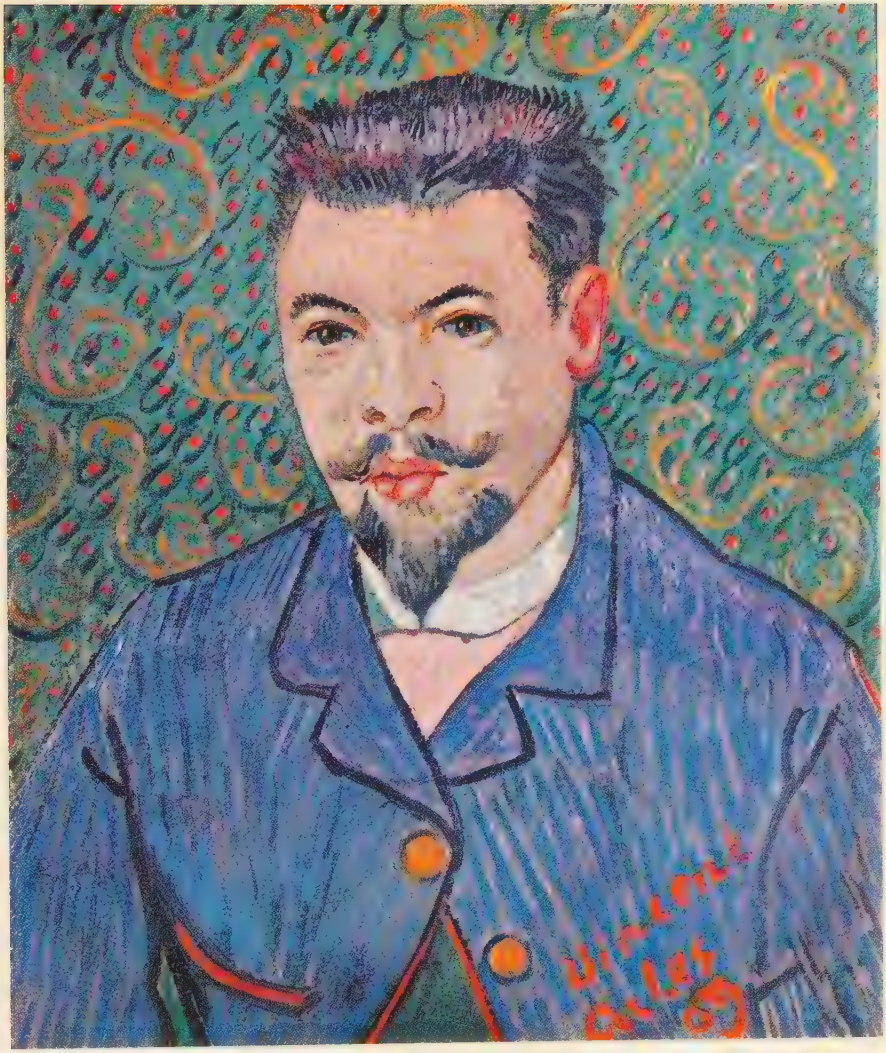
15. MADAME JOSEPH ROULIN ET SA FILLE MARCELLE (November 1888)
Robert Lehman Collection, New York

"My desire for marriage and children is fading and sometimes I am sad to feel like that at 35 . . . and sometimes I blame it on this horrible painting."

Van Gogh's search for beauty of character made him overlook much physical beauty. There were no half-measures. Even the seductive charm of a young girl, or the grace of a child's face, are missed as, for example, in the portrait of the Roulin baby which, at three months, has the same grave, serious look as its father, or the *Arlésienne en Mousmé*, whose hands are those of a labourer. "When I am painting," he wrote, "I want to express something consoling, like music, and I want to catch the fleeting glance of eternity in a face—the inner fire, formerly symbolized by the halo, and of which we now try to paint the essence."

Vincent succeeded in his aims in a small number of paintings which, in many cases, were the outcome of a long series of studies, both paintings and drawings. Sometimes the preliminary study is a rough sketch done on the spur of the moment, as, for example, Père Tanguy in the Copenhagen Museum or Madame Roulin in the Reinhardt Collection. Generally, these sketches were an attempt to record a subject quickly, an idea for further development; for instance, his self-portraits at Oslo (Plate 21) and the Courtauld Institute in London (Plate 17), or the versions of Tanguy and of Patience Escalier in the Niarchos and Jonas Collections. The ultimate aim can be seen by comparing all the versions of the same subject. Van Gogh was not trying to escape the facts of a subject, but rather to eliminate unnecessary detail, and, by suppressing aspects which seemed to have no bearing on it, to express more clearly the idea which he, himself, had formed of the sitter. He was thus able to transpose historical, religious, and mythical ideas into a modern idiom. Virgil eulogized the divinity of the Emperor Augustus, and Van Gogh presents Père Tanguy in the rôle of a leader of a fashionable trend. Vincent's originality and modernity consists in transforming his subjects without altering their appearance: the allegory is realistic.

In his letters Van Gogh stressed the importance of using striking colours. It is one of the clearest characteristics of his portraits, for his determination to accentuate and simplify contrasting subjects brought an



16. LE DOCTEUR FÉLIX REY (January 1889)

House Physician at Arles Hospital, twenty two years old. Pushkin Museum, Moscow

"If you want to please Dr. Rey I will tell you what to do. He has heard about the Rembrandt painting called the 'Anatomy Lesson' and I have told him I will get a print for him. I hope to do his portrait as soon as I am better."

extraordinary intensity to his work. Large flat areas of yellow, green, blue, red, or white rivet the attention of the onlooker like a clash of brass in an orchestra. Yet there is a real symbolic language to be found in his use of tone. Perhaps the "words" are missing, and the meaning may change from picture to picture, but meaning is always to be found. Blue suggests a dream; green, hope; yellow, life itself. The composition is as subtle as the colours are bold, and the contrast was undoubtedly intentional.

Van Gogh's models are all posed like early photographs. They usually have a far-away look, and in the full-length portraits the subject is seated, front view, with crossed hands, or resting them gently on the knees. The painter's intention was to eliminate the historical aspect of the pose, and to rivet our attention on the face and eyes. His efforts to simplify and idealize can very clearly be seen in the two portraits of Armand Roulin—the crudely coloured profile, and the gentler tones of the full face (Plate 14); and in the first portrait of Dr. Gachet with the book and vase, and the calmer undecorated portrait of the Louvre, here shown on Plate 27. Vincent's portraits are like the sun-flowers he loved to paint, with their long petals and stamens. The eyes of the model are the focal point, and he chose a background which would accentuate the personality of his sitter. The green corn of the *Paysanne d'Auvers*, Tanguy's prints and Boch's stars, Spahi Milliet's crescent moon, and the Japanese acanthus leaves of *La Berceuse*, and of Roulin and Rey, are as much symbols as they are colours and objects. Van Gogh liked to stress his allegorical motives by posing the hands of the model—Dr. Gachet clenches his fist; Mme Roulin (*La Berceuse*) holds the cord with which she rocks her daughter's cradle; the fresh young girl of *La Mousmé* holds a flowering branch, and the Ravoux child an orange; Mme Ginoux (*La Liseuse*) has books, while La Segatori (the *compère* of the *cabaret* called "Le Tambourin") is surrounded by drums; Patience Escalier (*Le Vieux Paysan*) leans on a stick. Everything, in fact,

17. AUTOPORTRAIT A L'OREILLE COUPÉE (January 1889)
Courtauld Institute, London

"Gauguin and I understand each other and even if we are a little mad does it matter? Surely we are artists enough to overcome anxieties on this score, just because we can paint. The whole world will probably be mad one day with some mania or another; but the antidote is to hand: Delacroix, Berlioz, Wagner..."

combines to enlarge the underlying personality which Vincent claimed to see, and to transform the sitter into the symbol of a profession, a character, or an activity.

The portrait of Dr. Rey, whose face, fortunately, we know well from a photograph taken when Vincent was at Arles, is a good example of this transformation. The regular, rather heavy features of the young doctor are reproduced exactly, and the portrait is a true likeness. A special atmosphere is produced by the pattern of stylized Oriental flowers which fill the whole background. The colours are arbitrary. To the astonishment of his sitter Vincent painted the beard blue and the hair red. The eyes are slightly slanted, and the transformation is complete. Rey, the provincial doctor, the house physician at Arles, has all the authority and mysterious power of a Buddha.

The portrait of Père Tanguy, painted about 1887 in Paris, is one of his first attempts in this style, and one of the most successful. Its evolution can be followed from the first sketch through three different paintings. In January, 1887, Vincent did a spontaneous and rapid sketch in which Tanguy is bareheaded (now in the Glyptothek, Copenhagen). The first version of the painting in the Niarchos Collection (Plate 4) was probably painted from life a few months later. Tanguy and Vincent were both admirers of Japanese prints, and the former sometimes sold them or lent them to the artist. It was, therefore, natural that Vincent should paint Tanguy surrounded by his prints. The whole picture (sitter, colouring, composition) evokes the fashion for *japonaiserie* which was ruling Paris at the time. But the portrait in the Musée Rodin, a masterpiece indeed, is very different. The choice of prints for the background has been altered, thus simplifying the composition and softening the tones. The suppression of unnecessary detail—spectacles protruding from a pocket, the sharp upturned brim of a hat—gives a sensation of calm serenity and warm-heartedness. Vincent's intention is clear—he wants to show his admiration for Tanguy. The big nose, unshaven face,

18. AUTOPORTRAIT A LA PIPE (January 1889)
Leigh Block Collection, Chicago

"Not far from here is an ancient tomb with the inscription : Blessed be Thebe, daughter of Telhui, and priestess of Osiris, who found fault in noone. I was subconsciously thinking of that as I was painting..."

and crude clothes of the merchant, all these the painter sees, but with no hint of mockery. Tanguy was the defender of the new faith, the inspired champion of Orientalism. The little shop in the rue Clauzel becomes a legend, a temple of tempting colours where there lives, not a badly-dressed old man but the god of the Japanese print.

Vincent could achieve his effect without the assistance of a symbolic background. When he painted Trabu at Saint-Rémy he wanted to express both calm and strength. The transposition is one of time and place—the hospital doctor looks down with the face of a Spanish grandee. A simple greyish background and the coarse striped jacket combine to give an impression of mystery and power. It is a painting in which sober colours and the linear composition produce an unusually striking effect (Plate 23).

The portraits of Mme Ginoux are entirely different. She it was who, with her husband, received Vincent with such sympathy at her cafe when he arrived in Arles. It seems that Vincent always thought of her (the first woman he met in Arles) as L'Arlésienne, even afterwards when he knew many others. After Roulin left, it was the Ginoux who looked after the house which Vincent had rented from him, and they who arranged to have his furniture brought there. Like the artist, Mme Ginoux had a nervous illness, and probably read a great deal. They used to exchange novels. Mme Ginoux often appears in Van Gogh's pictures, even once in an imaginary painting of Etten in Holland. The first portrait, which was finished in an hour, is a study from life. Mme Ginoux leans with her elbows on a table piled with books against a yellow background representing the sunshine at Arles. Then Vincent wanted to paint what he called "abstractions." First, *La Liseuse*—Mme Ginoux, now completely transformed, absorbed by her reading, the symbol of a passion. When this portrait was complete, a drawing by Gauguin led him to an idea peculiarly his own, and he began to paint a series which he called *Synthèses d'Arlésienne* (Plate 24). Apparently he was not

19. CAMILLE ROULIN, LE COLLÉGIEN (January 1889)
Museum of Sao Paulo, Brazil

"If you watch a child closely you will see that he already has the infinite in the expression of his eyes."

attempting a likeness of Mme Ginoux, who was living far away when he made these portraits at Saint-Rémy, but trying to express the charm and character of Arles through the personality of his sitter, a provincial café proprietress, whose intelligence and cultivated mind had seemed so admirable to him.

Writing to his brother, Théo, Vincent defines his idea of an allegorical portrait, referring to a painting of the artist, Boch, done in September, 1888, at Arles: "I am trying to paint the portrait of an artist friend, a man who dreams and works like a nightingale singing, because it is his nature. I want to paint my love and admiration for him, so first of all I shall draw him as faithfully as I can. But that will not be the end. I am going to alter the colours as I like—exaggerate the fair hair, add yellow, orange, or pale citron tones. I shall not paint the background as it is—the banal wallpaper of a mean little room. No; I shall make a simple background of blue, as deep as I know how, and the contrast of the fair hair against a rich blue will produce an effect of mystery like the stars in the sky. . . ." The Belgian painter, Eugène Boch, whom Vincent met at Arles, was thus transformed into a poet, into the symbol of poetry itself.

Van Gogh reached the summit of his long climb towards symbolism when he turned once more to painting the peasants in the fields, as he had done at Etten and Nuenen. The country people of Auvers are much more individual than those painted in Holland, for they are portraits. There is no longer any social comment; Vincent is now painting happy men and women. However, his imagination forces him to see their symbolic power, and to express it by his choice of background and activity. "I am trying," he wrote to Gauguin, "to make studies of growing corn . . . nothing but tall blue-green spears . . . and against such a living background I shall paint portraits."

His first successful portrait of this kind dates from the Paris period. It is a brilliant canvas in which the peasant girl seems to be almost

20. MADAME JOSEPH ROULIN, LA BERCEUSE (February 1889)
Bâle Museum (Staechelin Foundation)

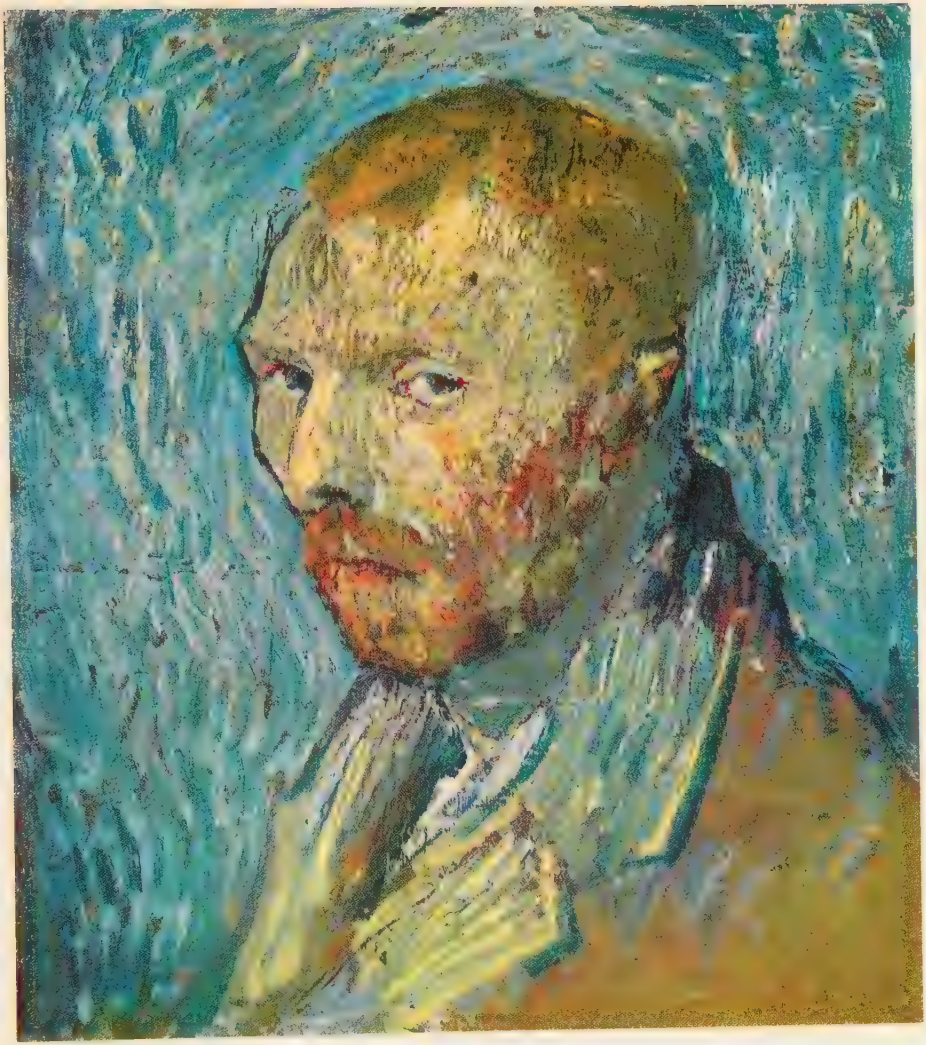
"There is a far deeper meaning to love than is generally supposed. 'No woman is old' does not mean that there are no old women, but that a woman who loves and is loved does not grow old."

drowning in the corn (Plate 7). Later, the artist was to disengage the figure from its background. *L'Homme au Bleuet* and *Jeune Paysan* (Plate 25) were painted with this intention, and from now on the socialist idealism of his earlier works was to be merged into his vision of the individual. He no longer fights against peasant misery, but stresses the dignity of work in the fields, using a design of flowers and trees as symbols. Alone, naked, Sien had been the incarnation of poverty. *La Paysanne au Chapeau* (Plate 26) is the symbol of health. At The Hague, when he was still hopeful, he painted life's worst aspects. In his last days he realized its beauty and dignity.

It would be difficult to imagine the work of Leonardo without the Mona Lisa. Nor would Vincent's painting be complete without the Roulin family. In five months he painted more than twenty portraits of the Roulins—a large and important part of his work as a portraitist. Because they were his friends, and he was grateful, he painted penetrating, brilliant portraits of them, and he had them in mind when he wrote to Théo, "I want to paint faces, faces and more faces; the evolution of the biped from babyhood to the wisdom of Socrates fascinates me. . . ." He believed himself not entirely useless to his friends: "You will understand, Théo, how I love to paint, and how it consoles me somewhat for not having become a doctor."

There were five in the Roulin family. The father, who was a post office employee at Arles station; Madame, a loyal wife and a good mother; Armand, a handsome boy of sixteen who later became a policeman; Camille, a lad of ten and a future chimney-sweep; and Marcelle, still a baby, and the only survivor in 1960.

The Roulin family gave Vincent the love and family-life he longed for, and which he believed was denied him. A firm friendship grew up between the painter and the postman—a deep understanding which had no need of words. Roulin was able to help Vincent discreetly and effectively. During the tragic events of Christmas, Roulin remained

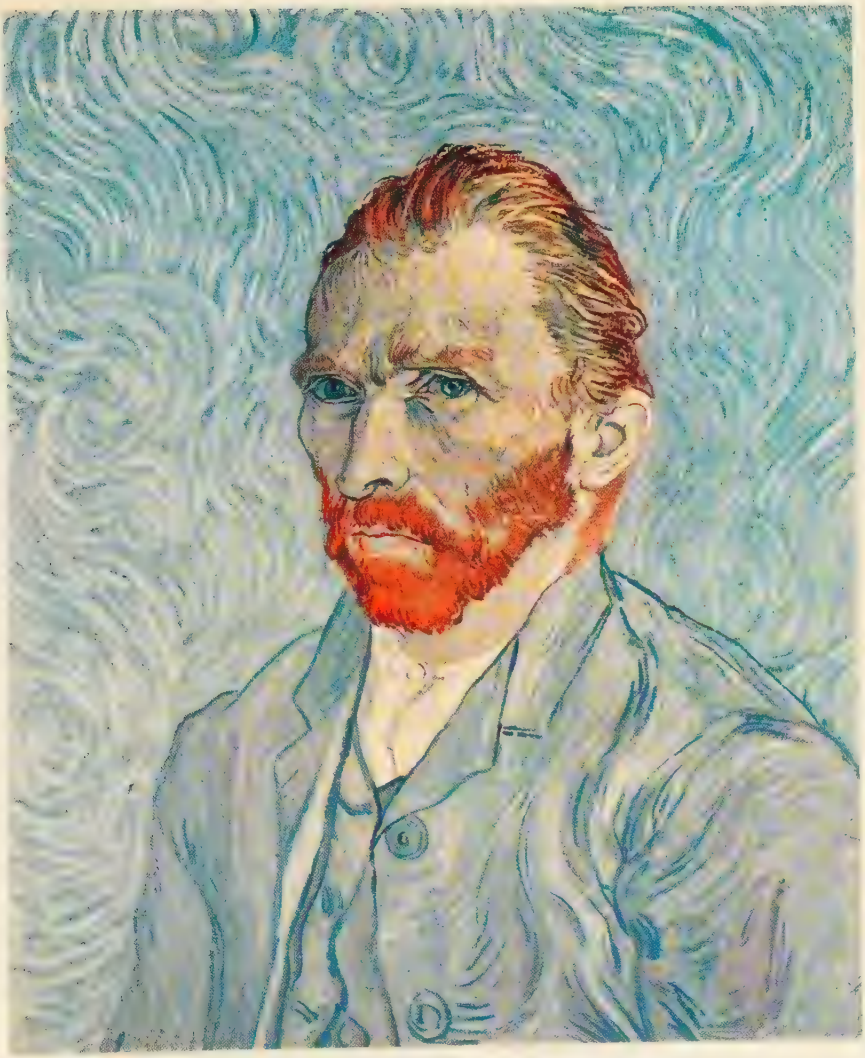


21. AUTOPORTRAIT DE VAN GOGH (about August 1889)
Oslo Museum

"My work and health make only spasmodic progress, but even this is amazing when I remember how I felt a month ago. I knew that one could break arms and legs and that they would heal, but I did not realize that one could be mad and yet recover."

loyal. Even after he had been transferred to Marseilles in January, 1889, the postman worried about the painter, and always visited him when he came to Arles. Vincent was afraid lest he become an aesthete, making pretty pictures for the *bourgeoisie* far removed from the sincerity of the people whose cause he served. Roulin's ready appreciation and comprehension of the paintings, which he hung in his house, supported and encouraged Van Gogh. More than that, the socialist-republican outlook of the postman, and his idealism, accorded well with the revolutionary spirit of the painter. He admired, if he did not always share, Roulin's convictions, just as he respected Tanguy, hero of the Commune of 1871. All three were fundamentally of the same mind. But, above all, Vincent loved the warm welcome of the Roulins, the peaceful unity of their family life. Every member of the family seemed admirable to him, and the birth of Marcelle a miracle of creation. Father, mother, brothers, and sister—it seemed to Vincent a revelation of the perfect human family, which he had never known or understood before. Armand Roulin was no ordinary young man. The portrait illustrated on Plate 14 has the charm, grace, and freedom of an ideal of youth, while the green ground symbolizes hope. Camille's portrait is full of childhood innocence.

Vincent worked hard and long on two of his masterpieces, the portraits of M. and Mme Roulin. In both cases he spent a long time experimenting. There are six versions of Roulin: full-length, half-length, and several studies of the head. Mme Roulin sat ten times. Roulin always sat full face, with his postman's hat on his head. The half-length of Plate 10 was done before the full-length of the Boston Museum. There he sits, firmly esconced in his armchair, as splendid in his blue uniform as any general, his beard spread out over his chest like two leafy trees. He gazes forward with a calm, good-natured, tolerant expression. Vincent wrote to Théo: "Although he is not old enough to be my father . . . yet he seems full of tenderness and concern for me, like an old soldier for a new recruit."



22. AUTOPORTRAIT DE VAN GOGH (September 1889)
Musée du Louvre, Paris

"To suffer in silence and alone, to face pain with resignation brings one to the brink of horror, and yet therein lies the faint hope that after death we shall understand the meaning of pain, which blots out our horizons and becomes a flood of despair."

This Roulin, a postman in Arles, who was able to see man's destiny, to understand the theory of colours, to relieve the miseries of existence for a poor Dutch painter alone in a small southern village, to take an interest in the artist's work—this man must have seemed a sage, a latter-day Socrates.

The portrait of Mme Roulin is the realization of a dream, of experiments repeated many times. After the period at The Hague Vincent made many studies, both in pencil and watercolour, of Sien suckling her baby. The Nuenen series of paintings and drawings of nests is undoubtedly a resurgence of the same theme in another guise. He had already painted a version of *La Berceuse* in Paris, but the close *bourgeois* atmosphere of the composition, in which the mother is posed by the cradle as though for a family photograph, is much less moving than the paintings of Arles or the drawings of The Hague. Before starting on the final picture, which he was to repeat five times, Vincent painted Mme Roulin alone in her house; in the crowded café; then twice holding the baby, Marcelle (Plate 15). No other sitter (except the self-portraits) was painted so often. In the end Vincent chose a less elaborate, more symbolic composition, in which the presence of the child is suggested only by the cord which the mother pulls to rock the cradle.

Vincent wrote at great length about this picture in his letters. He even painted the title, *La Berceuse*, on the canvas. To his friend, Emile Bernard who was also a painter, he wrote: "I have allowed myself to make an abstract of *La Berceuse*," and again to Théo: "We had been talking of the melancholy solitude of the *Pêcheurs d'Islande*, facing danger alone on the sea . . . and I thought I would paint a picture for sailors—children and martyrs as they are—which they could look at in their cabins, and which would remind them of the songs their mothers sang. I agree it did rather resemble a coloured lithograph at a bazaar—a woman dressed in green, with orange-coloured hair, against a green background with pink flowers—but now I have softened the cruder rose, orange,

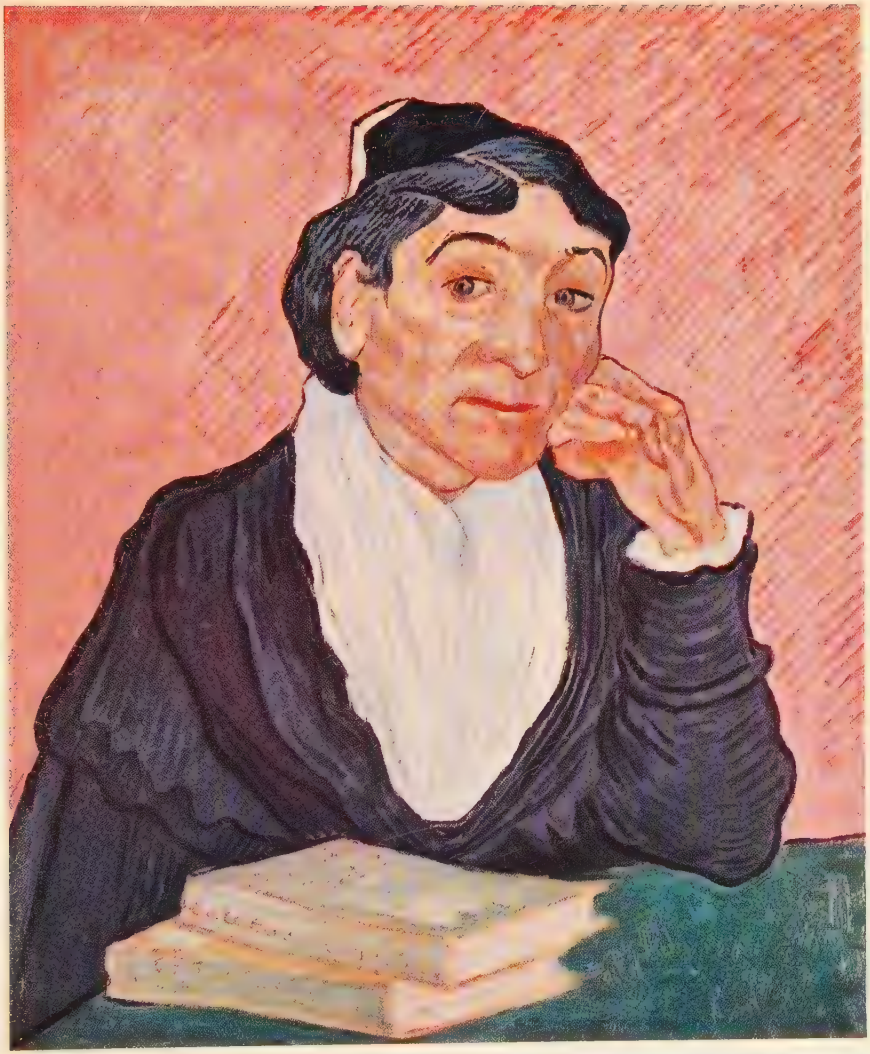
23. TRABU (September 1889)
Supervisor of the Hospice of Saint-Rémy. Dübi Collection, Soleure

"He was at the Marseilles hospital during the cholera epidemics : a man who has seen great suffering and death, who bears the traits of unimagined experience on his face like Guizot... but he is a man of the people, simple and sincere. If his face were not softened by a kindly expression, he would look like a hawk, an eagle. But he is a type often seen in the Midi."

and green tones with touches of red. . . . I am trying to paint the sort of picture which a sailor, with no knowledge of painting, would imagine when thinking of a woman at home. . . .," and again: "Your remarks about *La Berceuse* pleased me very much. It is true that people who like crude colours, and enjoy listening to a barrel-organ, are perhaps nearer the truth than these fellows on the Boulevards who frequent the Salon. . . "

Mme Roulin (Plate 20) is seated in a very natural position, her hands folded on her lap. Her chair, for she was sitting in Van Gogh's house, is the one used by Gauguin. The background shows us once again the bizarre Oriental wallpaper of flowers and leaves which appears in other portraits done at Arles, for instance, those of Roulin and Rey. Nothing is dramatized or arranged. Van Gogh painted instinctively. Standing before Mme Roulin he feels himself alone "in melancholy isolation, the fisherman far out to sea." He wanted to paint the safety, the calm and protective atmosphere, which he experienced in the Roulin's home. So the myth of the Great Mother, of the Virgin, took shape under Vincent's hand. "Our Lady" is more real to him, less divine, reincarnated with the features of a kindly Arlésienne, the wife of a postman with simple, homely gestures. Her gaze is gentle and without passion; the cord attached to the cradle of her daughter is a life-line for those crying for help.

"To paint a good portrait seems to me to be the artist's finest object." Odilon Redon's words might well have come from Van Gogh. From the beginning, from his early portraits of workers and peasants to the symbolic portraits of Arles and Auvers, Van Gogh was always searching for contact with his fellow-men. He made many landscapes and still-lifes which were, more or less, concessions to the theories of the Impressionists, or even studies and practice for his real work, which, as his letters reveal, was the study of the human face—the portrait. Only in that field was he fully realized and master of himself. The wilful drawing



24. MADAME GINOUX EN ARLÉSIENNE (February 1890)
Museum of Sao Paulo, Brazil

"My dear Gauguin... I am very happy that you like my Arlésienne, which was done after your drawing... she is a synthesis, if you like, and you can take her as the outcome of all our months of work together. I know that, besides you, there are not many who could understand it... my friend Dr. Gachet, though, saw it at once. 'How difficult it is to be simple,' he said."

and arbitrary colouring of *L'Eglise d'Auvers* is surprising, but the same technique, the same allegorical approach, makes the self-portrait of the Louvre a strangely realistic work.

It is true that, in comparison with the great masters, Van Gogh's sensitivity, his constant preoccupation with serving mankind by painting, his tendency to paint moralities, and his taste for a slightly anecdotal kind of painting, would disbar him from taking his place among the giants of Parnassus, but his defects are just those qualities which are most obviously lacking in twentieth century painting. Vincent's work may sometimes be crude and unfinished; it is always spontaneous. His themes may be obvious, but each work is its own justification. Its impact is immediate. Vincent knew why he was painting. He was trying to help his sitters and his onlookers to unveil the secrets which would help them through life. Mankind is the very core of his art. Man is in need of consolation—he, it is, who consoles. "Do you know the way to escape from this prison?", Vincent wrote. "It is through love, deep and profound. To love is to open the prison doors as though by magic . . . those who cannot love stay close to death. . . . Wherever there is love, sympathy, there is new life. . . ."

25. JEUNE PAYSAN DEVANT DES CHAMPS (May 1890)
Private Collection, Italy

"Many good people will only see a caricature in this picture. But we who have read La Terre *and* Germinal *want to show, if we paint a peasant, that we have understood what was written."*

THE LIFE AND WORKS OF VAN GOGH

Although many books have been written about Van Gogh very few are complete. The best biography is Trabault, *Van Gogh,* Hachette, 1960, and a worthwhile study: Leymarie, *Van Gogh,* Tisné 1951. The *Correspondance Complète* (Letters) was published by V. W. Van Gogh, Amsterdam, Werelbibliothek, 3 volumes in 1954, and in a French edition in 1961; it is also worth consulting *Lettres de Van Gogh à Théo,* Gallimard, 1953. The only *catalogue raisonné* of the drawings and paintings of Van Gogh is that of *La Faille.* The first edition is the best, four volumes published by Van Oest, 1928, although it has several doubtful pictures and does not include the list of paintings mentioned in the letters but not yet identified. In the list of works which follows, the abbreviation *F* followed by a number indicates a reference to this catalogue.

The largest collections of Van Gogh's work are those of M. V. W. Van Gogh, Théo's son, which are nearly all on view at the Municipal Museum of Amsterdam, those in the Kröller-Müller Museum at Otterlo near Arnhem, and the Musée du Jeu de Paume, Paris.

March 30th, 1853 — Birth of Van Gogh at Zundert in the Netherlands. His parents were well-to-do middle-class and his father the minister in the village.

26. PAYSANNE AU CHAPEAU (June 1890)
Hahnloser Collection, Berne

"You should look about and admire as much as you can, most people do not wonder enough at the beauty of nature. Walk in the fields and observe, that is the best way to understand art. Painters understand and love nature and teach us to appreciate it."

1864-1868 After passing through the school at Zundert he became a boarder in schools at Zevenbergen and Tilburg.

1869-1873 Employee of the Goupil Gallery at The Hague, Vincent earned his living and began to take an interest in art.

1873-1875 He was sent to the London branch of Goupil and later went to Paris. While in London he fell in love with Ursula Loyer and became slack and unpunctual. He was dismissed on the 1st January, 1876.

1876 Vincent consoled himself with Bible reading and contemporary fiction. He was a language teacher at first, but left after a few weeks to become a Methodist preacher's assistant.

1877-1878 Intent on following in his father's footsteps Vincent spent three months working in a bookshop at Dordrecht, then tried to take up his studies again for the entrance examination to the University. After a year he gave this up and went to a school for methodist ministers.

1878-1880 He was sent as an evangelical missionary to the poverty-stricken town of Wasmes in the Belgian mining area. He worked with great zeal but was dismissed after six months. In spite of this he remained nearby at Cuesmes to continue his mission.
There are a very few drawings—figures inspired by Holbein and Millet—done in the Borinage. The most important is : Les Femmes Mineurs revenant du Terril (F. 832).

1880-1881
Etten Worn out, he went for a few weeks to Brussels and then back to his father who had moved to Etten. He fell in love with a cousin staying in the same village, Key Vos, who refused him. More or less without

27. LE DOCTEUR PAUL GACHET (June 1890)
Musée du Louvre, Paris

"I have found a complete friend in Dr. Gachet, he seems like a brother, we are so alike. He too is very nervous and bizarre and has helped many of the struggling young artists. I did his portrait the other day..."

work, Vincent passed the time in reading and drawing. *There are several drawings of peasants working, and two portrait drawings after Holbein (F. 847 and 848), a portrait in profile of a young woman (F. 849) and those of his father (F. 876) and his mother, the gardener Piet Kaufmann and the old farmer Schuitemaker.*

1881-1883
The Hague

Théo supported Vincent in a very humble way at The Hague, where he began to study painting methodically. He lived with a pregnant girl, who already had children, Classina Maria Hoornik, nicknamed Sien.
Very few oil paintings. Vincent did many more drawings and watercolours of Sien, her children, workers and fishermen. (F. 929, 929 b and 1653; 948 to 1028; 1043 to 1085). Portrait drawing of Blok, the bookseller.

1883-1885
Nuenen

Abandoned by Sien he went once more to his parents, then at Nuenen, and began to paint furiously.
The participants of the Mangeurs de Pommes de Terre, who have been identified (F. 77, 78, 82) were painted several times : the central figure (F. 85, 130, 140, 141, 156 etc.); the right hand figure (F. 70, 80, 80 b, 146 b, 388...) ; the left hand figure (F. 163, 164, 165 etc.). Much of the work done at this period has disappeared.

November 28th, 1885-
February 28th, 1886
Antwerp

His father died and Vincent left Nuenen to study painting at Antwerp.
The first self-portraits (F. 180, 181, and 208, Van Gogh collection) and (F. 178, The Hague Museum). Some unknown portraits : Vieillard (F. 205, Van Gogh Collection), Une Fille (F. 206, Van Gogh Collection) and (F. 207, Whyler Collection, New York) and many drawings (F. 1357, 1358 and 1359 etc.).

March 1886-
February 21st, 1888
Paris

Goes to Paris to join Théo, who is director of a picture gallery. Vincent painted a great deal and met many artists.

28. MARGUERITE GACHET
A DIX-NEUF ANS (June 1890)
Musée de Bâle

Very many self-portraits, most of which are in the Van Gogh Collection (F. 522, 524, 344, 294, 296, 269, 267, 263 b, 77, 179, 109, 356, 61, 469; F. 526 Detroit Museum; F. 268, 365, 320 Louvre; F. 319 Bâle Museum; F. 345, 366, 380 Kröller-Müller Museum; F. 295 Municipal Museum of Amsterdam). The portrait of Père Tanguy which is the principal portrait of this period exists in four versions : a painted study (F. 263 Glyptothek of Copenhagen), a sketch (F. 364, Niarchos Collection) and the final version (F. 363 in the Musée Rodin, Paris), and also a drawing (F. 1412). La Mère Tanguy was painted as a pair to F. 263 (F. 357 Staechelin Collection, Bâle). The painter and picture-dealer, Alexandre Reid, was painted twice (F. 343 and F. 270), La Segatori once (F. 370, Van Gogh Collection). Some studies have not been identified : L'Italienne (F. 381), Une Femme assise dans l'Herbe (F. 367), Un Homme à la Calotte (F. 289, Van Gogh Collection) ; perhaps he is Père Tanguy's friend mentioned in the correspondence? La Femme près d'un Berceau (F. 369, Van Gogh Collection) has been identified by Trabault (unpublished) ; Un Homme was drawn several times (F. 1369 and 1370).

February 21st, 1888-
May 3rd, 1889
Arles

Vincent left Paris for the south seeking peace and sunlight. He settled at Arles, which he liked so much that he wrote to Gauguin asking him to join him. From October to December, 1888, Gauguin and Van Gogh lived in the same house working enthusiastically together. During the night of December 23/24 Vincent cut off the lobe of his right ear, taking it to a prostitute before returning home to fall bleeding on his bed. Gauguin abandoned him and went to Paris. After another attack in February, Vincent was taken to hospital at Arles. When he was discharged he went voluntarily to a mental home to try to be cured.

Every member of the ROULIN *family was painted several times : the* mother *once in a study (F. 503, Reinhardt Collection, Winterthur), twice with her daughter Marcelle (F. 490, Lehman Collection, New York), and (F. 491), five times as La Berceuse : (F. 504, Kröller-Müller Museum), (F. 507, Van Gogh Collection), (F. 506, Art Institute of Chicago), (F. 508, Metropolitan Museum of New York) and (F. 505, Bâle Museum) ; also in La Salle de Danse (F. 547).* The baby Marcelle *was painted three times : (F. 440, Chester Dale Collection, New York) ; (F. 441, Van Gogh Collection) and (F. 441 b).* Camille Roulin, *the son of ten years was painted two or three times : (F. 538, Van Gogh Collection), (F. 537, Worcester Art Museum) and undoubtedly (F. 665, Museum of São Paulo).* Armand Roulin, *the boy of sixteen, twice : first version (F. 493, Rotterdam Museum), second version (F. 492, Essen Museum).* The postman Roulin, *five times : (F. 432, F. 434, Musée de Winterthur), (F. 435, Barnes Foundation), (F. 436 and F. 439, Kröller-Müller Museum) and two drawings : (F. 1458 and 1459).*

Madame GINOUX *appears several times as l'Arlésienne : (F. 488, Metropolitan Museum, New York) and also in a series done at Saint-Rémy : (F. 540, 541, Kröller-Müller Museum), (F. 542, Museum of São Paulo), (F. 543) ; also as La Liseuse (F. 496, Pushkin Museum, Moscow), very poor condition.*

The young girl *of twelve who was painted "en Mousmé" (F. 431, National Gallery of Washington) and twice drawn (F. 1503 and 1504) has not been identified, nor has the* Zouave, *of whom there is a bust (F. 423) and a full length (F. 424). The peasant* Patience ESCOLIER *was twice painted : a study (F. 443, Jonas Collection, New York) and a second version (F. 444, National Gallery, London), and twice drawn : (F. 1460 and F. 1461). The* painter BOCH *as a poet (F. 462, the*

Louvre), the Second Lieutenant MILLIET *(F. 473, Kröller-Müller Museum), the* Doctor REY *(F. 500, Pushkin Museum, Moscow), and the* mother of Van Gogh *(F. 477, Pitcairn Collection) were done as half lengths. There are several unidentified portrait heads : some men (F. 532, Van Gogh Collection), (F. 534, Barnes Foundation), (F. 533, Kröller-Müller Museum) ; an adolescent boy (F. 535) ; a young girl (F. 518, Kröller-Müller Museum) ; a young man (F. 536) ; an old woman (F. 390).*

There are very few self-portraits : two were painted after the Christmas drama: (F. 527, a study, in the Courtauld Collection, London), and (F. 529 the last one, Leigh Block Collection, Chicago). Three are earlier : (F. 476, dedicated to Gauguin, Wertheim Collection, New York), (F. 501, dedicated to Laval) and (F. 525, Lütjens, Zurich).

May 3rd 1889-
May 15th 1890
Saint-Rémy

He was well cared for at the private hospice of Saint-Paul-de-Mausole at Saint-Rémy-de-Provence and the nervous attacks lessened but did not altogether disappear. At the end of a year he felt that he could get better attention in the North and left in the hope of a cure.

Trabu *supervisor of the hospital and his wife were twice painted ; the copies given to Trabu are lost. The only known portrait of Mme. Trabu (F. 631) was lost in May 1945 in Saxony ;* Trabu *(F. 629) belongs to the Dübi Collection, Soleure.* Sister Epiphany, *Mother of the Hospice, is represented in the* Pietà *(F. 630 and F. 757). One of the patients (F. 703) was identified by Trabu at the end of his life. The picture representing a barman (Letter 602) has disappeared. Vincent did at least three self-portraits : (F. 627, Louvre), (F. 528, Oslo), (F. 626, Whitney Collection, London). He also repeated the portrait of Mme. Ginoux.*

May 20th-
July 20th, 1890
Auvers

He spent three days in Paris and then went to Dr. Gachet's clinic at Auvers-sur-Oise near Pontoise. In July he went to Paris to see Théo, who was very depressed—probably ill—and who talked of leaving his job. On the 27th July Vincent shot himself in the chest: he died on the 29th. Théo died six months later.

The GACHET *family consisted of the doctor and his son and daughter. The father sat three times. Two paintings: the first version (F. 753, Kramarski Collection, New York), second version (F. 754, Louvre) and an engraving (F. 1664). Mademoiselle Gachet was painted twice: once playing the piano (F. 772, Bâle Museum) and in the garden (F. 756, Louvre).*

Of the RAVOUX *family neither the father nor the mother was ever painted by Vincent, but Adeline their daughter of thirteen was painted three times: (F. 786, Chrysler Collection, New York), (F. 768, Museum of San Francisco) and (F. 769); and the nephew (F. 785, Jäggli Collection, Winterthur). Some unidentified models posed also for Van Gogh. A young peasant girl (F. 788, study, Chester Dale Collection, New York), and a second version (F. 774, Hahnloser Collection, Berne); a young boy with a flower in his mouth (F. 787), and a peasant (F. 531), and two children (F. 783, Louvre) and (F. 784).*

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National Gallery of Art, Washington (Chester Dale Collection)

Back: AUTOPORTRAIT DE VAN GOGH AU CHAPEAU MOU (Paris 1887)
V. W. Van Gogh, Laren

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